

## The Job of a Juror

Thomas Jefferson is quoted as saying that jury duty is the single most important duty of a citizen in the United States. While it is thought that being called for jury duty can create some inconvenience, most people will say that if you are fortunate enough to be selected to serve on a jury, you will find the experience extremely rewarding. National studies indicate that more than 80% of jurors actually selected find the experience to have been very favorable. When being a juror, you will be asked to perform one of the highest duties of citizenship, that is, to sit in judgment on facts which will determine the guilt or innocence of persons charged with a crime.

Unfortunately, not everyone called to jury duty will be able to serve on the jury for which they have been called for. At the beginning of a jury trial, a panel of jurors must be selected from a list of names of those people who are voters in the state/county that you reside in. In criminal cases there will be a jury of 12 members, plus up to two or three persons who serve as alternate jurors. An **Alternate Juror** is someone who hears all the evidence and is ready to stand in for another juror who may become ill or need to leave the jury before the end of the case.

All trials start with the selection of a **fair and impartial** jury. To accomplish that, the Court will ask each possible juror questions to discover whether they have knowledge of any previous information concerning the case, or if they have any opinions or attitudes which may cause you to favor or disfavor one side or the other. The questions may probe deeply into attitudes, beliefs and experiences, but are not intended to embarrass anyone. If a juror believes they can not be fair, they should ask the judge and can be excused from

jury service in that trial. Also, if the attorneys feel that a juror cannot be fair, they can ask to have that juror excused. This is called **challenged**, meaning the attorney is “challenging” the selection of that person for jury service on a particular case.

After the jury is selected, they will hear evidence presented by the government that is intended to prove the guilty of the defendant. The defendant is also allowed to present evidence in defense of their innocence. The defendant is not required to present any evidence and cannot be forced to testify to prove their innocence.

Only after everyone has presented their evidence is the jury allowed to discuss the case. This is called the jury **deliberation** process. In criminal cases, all 12 jurors must agree on a verdict. If after diligent deliberation a **unanimous** verdict can not be reached, this is called a “**Hung Jury**” and the judge may declare a “mistrial.” If a mistrial is declared, the case may be dismissed by the government, or may proceed to trial a second time before a new set of jurors.